

**Letter of Henry Addison, esq., on behalf of the
corporation of Georgetown, to the Hon. A.G. Brown,
chairman of the Senate committee on the District of
Columbia, touching the memorial of Capt. B.S. Roberts**

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Letter of Henry Addison, Esq., ON BEHALF OF THE CORPORATION OF
GEORGETOWN, TO THE HON. A. G. BROWN, CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE
COMMITTEE ON THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TOUCHING THE MEMORIAL OF
CAPT. B. S. ROBERTS.

POLKINNORN, PR., 9 ST. EST. 6TH & 7TH, WASHINGTON.

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To Hon. Albert G. Brown, *Chairman of the Senate's District Committee*:

Sir: I have been requested by the Corporate Authorities of Georgetown to reply to and expose the extraordinary and in excusable mistatements, and egregious blunders, which are contained in a memorial which has lately been presented to Congress by Capt. B. S. Roberts. It is true that he has secured the signatures of twelve other persons to that remarkable paper, but it is well known that the whole thing is a novelty of his own invention, and it is more of an act of simple justice than a flattering compliment, to hold him responsible for its authorship.

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The memorial is little else than a mass of incongruous statements, reckless assertions, and gross perversions of facts and history, as if for the express purpose of deception.

He prays that you will deprive our Corporation of about one-tenth of its limited and already diminished territory. The reasons which he has allowed himself to urge in behalf of his preposterous proposition are as follows, viz:

First.

“Your petitioners are so far removed from the business part of the town as to derive no benefit from its regulations, or have the slightest protection to property or persons through its police.”

That statement is simply untrue in the whole of its particulars. He lives within half a mile of the most populous part of the town, and is as much within the sphere of its municipal safeguards, and its inherent advantages, as any other person whose premises are within our corporate limits.

Second.

“Your petitioners' property, mainly in large lots and parcels of land, of little value compared with lots in the business 4 town, is generally taxed for corporate purposes on a valuation excessively beyond its real value; and the application of this tax goes wholly to the improvement of the business streets in which your petitioners have no interest.”

It is true that some of the petitioners have large lots, but, to beget the idea that they are farms or plantations, he choses to designate them as “ *parcels of land*, ” when he knows that they are the mere seats of palatial residence, carefully selected from the large bodies of land which their original proprietors “ *humbly prayed* ” to be taken in our corporate limits. Yes, sir, more than sixty-five years ago did those original proprietors approach the Legislature of Maryland in the manner set forth as follows: “Whereas Thomas Beall,

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son of George, of Montgomery County, (in which Georgetown was then located,) by his *humble petition* to this General Assembly, hath set forth that he is seized of a part of a tract of land called and known by the name of the 'Rock of Dunbarton,' *adjoining Georgetown*, containing sixty-one acres, *which he is desirous of annexing to said town*, and therefore prays that a law may be passed for that purpose; and it appearing to this General Assembly, that to extend and enlarge the limits of said town will greatly contribute to promote the trade and commerce thereof." And, for these reasons, Mr. Beall's "humble petition" was granted in the year of grace 1783. In the year 1784, that same Assembly spoke as follows: "Whereas Robert Peter, Wm. Deakins, Jr., Charles Beatty, and John Threlkeld, *by their humble petition* to this General Assembly, have set forth, that they have agreed to lay out, as an addition to Georgetown, twenty acres and eighteen thirty-seconds of an acre of ground," and their "humble petition" was granted. The value of all these lands was greatly enhanced by being thus annexed to our town, and the larger portion of them have long since become densely populated. These agreements conferred reciprocal advantages, has been honorably observed by all parties, and was intended to be as permanent as "the Rock of Dunbarton," itself. That is the venerable compact, built upon a "Rock," 5 and which has been stable for more than sixty years, which a mere stranger, a resident of recent induction, seeks clandestinely to violate and trample under his feet. All this he has sought to do under guises entirely too thin to conceal the cupidity of his motive. Nor did he hesitate to strive to uphold his proposition by slanderously charging the authorities of the town with misapplying, unlawfully, and dishonorably, the taxes which were imposed upon his property. Where is his proof that the "*application of the tax upon his property goes wholly to the improvement of the business streets in which he had no interest?*" The assertion is utterly untrue, and its author deserves to be reprobated for his insolent recklessness.

It is wholly untrue that the land of the petitioners is "of little value compared with lots in the business town," or that said lots are "generally taxed for corporate purposes on a valuation excessively beyond its real value." There may be exceptions, but "generally" the property

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within this complaining region could not be bought at its assessed value. Mr. Roberts, as I have just stated, says that the "application of this tax goes *wholly* to the improvement of the business streets, in which your petitioners have no interest." So far from that tax being applied "wholly" for the purpose stated by him, it is not so *at all*. Every street in town is improved out of taxes specially levied upon the property binding on the same. In cases of small repairs, which are made occasionally for the preservation of the streets, the expense is *sometimes* paid out of the General Treasury, and no where is that oftener done than within the limits sought to be excluded. Having, myself, for twelve successive years superintended the improvement and repairs of our streets, I make this statement upon my own personal knowledge of the facts.

Third.

"Again, there is no prospect of any such renewed prosperity or growth of Georgetown as to require any portion of your petitioners' property for its corporate purposes, or to give facility to its trade or commerce, and they therefore respectfully ask 6 relief from a system of taxation without advantage to their property, for nearly a century, and which in its effects depreciates it and impoverishes the owners."

While our assessments and taxes are impartially rated and imposed, as they always have been, there need be little apprehension that they will carry "depreciation and impoverishment" to the exclusive and imposing abodes of an opulent and highly perfumed aristocracy.

And Mr. Roberts must be again reminded of "the Rock of Dunbarton," and the solemn compact which was built upon it. We think that the Bealls, and Threlkelds, and Deakins, and Beattys, and the other old fathers of Georgetown, were wiser, in all such matters, than the children now walking about in men's garments, and writing memorials in which truth is discarded as a homely ingredient. They were the giants of those days, and standing upon the "Roek of Dunbarton," in the fulness of a sagacity which penetrated the vista of a

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distant futurity, they saw and foretold “ *that to extend and enlarge the limits of Georgetown will greatly contribute to promote the trade and commerce thereof,*” and the assembled wisdom of Maryland endorsed and signalized that declaration by a solemn and imposing act of legislation. We trust that it is not too late for Mr. Roberts to contemplate that act of wisdom with profitable humility.

As it will not be possible for me, in these brief limits, to show how absurd are the fugitive notions of Mr. Roberts, and to what extent our town would be deformed should they be adopted by Congress, I will place a map of the town in your hands upon which shall be appropriate illustrations of a miserable proposition, which has found countenance only from thirteen persons out of a population of more than ten thousand. You will perceive, on inspecting that map, that Mr. Roberts proposes to leave within our corporate limits that portion of our town which lies nearly a mile's length in the rear of his own premises. Should you grant his petition you would of course put his property outside of the city limits, but would leave him, 7 at the same time, just about midway between the remaining northern and southern boundaries of the town. If his own lot is too distant from “the business town” to be properly subject to “the operation of municipal laws,” why is not that too distant which lies nearly a mile in his rear?

He forgets, too, to tell you that he is attempting to force some people out of the town entirely without their concurrence.

Mr. Roberts has some obscure and confused notions in his head about a certain “natural road.” “A natural road” must be appended to the catalogue of new ideas, merely, as it cannot, in anywise, be patented as an invention. I was not aware that “roads” were original fixtures, or of the growth of times and seasons, nor do I find any mention made of them in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. It is generally thought that they are made by man's hands, when he has the right and means of making them, and that he locates and directs them according to his own ideas of necessity and convenience, without regard to valleys, plains, or mountains. But whether Mr. Roberts' “road” be a natural or an

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artificial one, is of but little importance, as, from his own description of it, it can claim no resemblance, in any of its particulars, to any other "road" over which it has been the luck of man to travel. It is but fair that that learned gentleman should be allowed to describe his own "road" in his own words, as followeth:

"To have the natural road along the base of the heights through Stoddert street, continued in an easterly direction to Rock Creek, and west in front of the premises known as "Tuder Place" to its west line, following that line until it is intersected by the continuation to Seventh street, thence along the said last street to Frederick street, declared by law the northern boundary of said Corporation."

The people of Georgetown will readily understand what all this means as soon as they read it, but you can only comprehend its meanness and absurdity by referring to the map and the deep block line which indicates the beginning, continuation, and end of Captain B. S. Roberts' "natural road."

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In conclusion, sir, I beg leave to state that our Corporation now owes a funded debt of more than \$200,000, which was contracted by making improvements of vast importance to the whole town, and which have imparted great additional value to "the heights." The whole of our property, "the heights" included, is bound for the payment of the interest upon that debt as well as for its ultimate extinguishment. It fully comports with Mr. Roberts' convictions of moral honesty, to withdraw one-tenth of our territory from all just responsibility for that debt, and to saddle the whole of it upon his neighbors, thereby increasing the value of his own property and inflicting a corresponding depreciation upon others.

We brand it as a disreputable proposition, and feel that it will be indignantly discountenanced by Congress.

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With great respect your obedient servant, H. ADDISON.

Georgetown, D. C., *May*, 1858.